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Joint Inspection Unit

Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals".

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JIU/REP/2016/5

Independent system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development

EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM TO STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITIES FOR STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND DATA COLLECTION TO SUPPORT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) AND OTHER INTERNATIONALLY-AGREED DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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In my capacity as inspector of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and as Chair of the Evaluation Management Group, I would like to thank all who played a role in supporting the evaluation.

I would like to thank Member States for their foresight in selecting a topic that is relevant for the 2030 Agenda and for providing extrabudgetary resources to pilot the conduct of a comprehensive independent system-wide evaluation of development results. Their involvement at various stages helped to enhance the strategic value of the evaluation. Special recognition is given to the Permanent Missions of Benin, Fiji, Honduras, Ireland, Norway and Switzerland. National officials of the 16 countries that were selected for an in-depth study played a key role in providing information for analysis. Forty-three countries provided information for the validation of the findings. We are most grateful for their commitment to this work. This appreciation is extended to the many development partners who also granted time for consultation and provided extensive data and information.

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Appreciation goes to seven evaluation offices of United Nations system organizations for their commitment to a shared vision for independent system-wide evaluation. They are the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). They contributed as members of the Evaluation Management Group (EMG) to enhance the professional and technical quality of the evaluation, and some of them provided funds required to initiate the evaluation. Special recognition goes to UNICEF for providing much-needed financial support at a critical stage of the evaluation and for staff expertise to support the management of the evaluation.

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The Interim Coordination Mechanism (ICM) of the ISWE initiative, chaired by the JIU, with membership from OCHA, the United Nations Department of Economic and Socials Affairs (UN-DESA), UNEG, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), and UNDG enhanced the efficient management of the evaluation. I am grateful for their advisory role and suggestions for practical and realistic approaches in the conduct of the evaluation.

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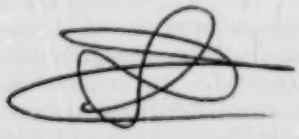
Last but not least, I would like to thank the JIU focal points for their extensive support in coordination.

Details on the individuals from the various organizations and groups can be found in the Technical Appendix to this report.



Sukai Prom-Jackson, Inspector
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Chair, Evaluation Management Group

Foreword

At a time of increasing scrutiny of development results and impact, and given the clear need to have a good understanding of what works, why, and where, there is an increased focus in many development agencies and in many countries on measurement, monitoring, analysis and evaluation. Data and statistics play a significant role in supporting the development of robust evidence required by these functions that support decision-making and governance. This is critical for reducing risks in decision-making in a highly complex and fast moving world. This drive for strong evidence based on valid statistics is what is behind the data revolution and has been central to the dialogue around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The extensive and integrated set of goals and indicators for sustainable development in the 2030 Agenda will be challenging for all countries to measure, monitor and achieve. This will be particularly true for developing countries. It nevertheless provides a great opportunity for such countries to play a key role in the development of the conceptual and political frameworks for defining results and for the production and use of relevant statistics. It also provides an opportunity for the United Nations system and development partners to reconsider old models in supporting countries as they seek to define appropriate capacities for the development of the statistics system.

This evaluation examines the relevance, coherence, and the added value of the United Nations system as a whole in strengthening national capacities for statistical data collection, analysis, and use. It provides a good basis for helping frame the dialogue on the continued role of the United Nations system in supporting countries and the changes that are needed to enhance its comparative value in a diverse and rapidly transforming world with multiple players all seeking to enhance development results.

The evaluation concludes that the United Nations system has made a positive contribution to strengthening national capacities for the production of statistics but that there are challenges to addressing the difficult task of supporting better use of statistics. The strategic positioning of the United Nations system needs to be strengthened across the global, regional and national level. At the national level, greater coordination, coherence and integration is required to strengthen the contribution of the United Nations system.

The evaluation recommends that support for national statistical capacity development should become a major strategic priority for the United Nations system and that the principal goal of this work is the better use of statistics to support the achievement of national development goals including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Three other institutional recommendations are made to address challenges at the global, regional, and national levels.

This evaluation is an outcome of the pilot of an innovative framework for conducting independent system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development: a framework which addresses the mandate and demand, the governance, function, organizational arrangements, funding, and partnership arrangements for conducting such evaluations. It leverages existing mechanisms for evaluation in the United Nations system, building on the comparative added value

of the external and internal evaluation units of the United Nations system and enhancing mutual capacity development.

The approach represents one of the most concrete ways of addressing changes needed in the United Nations system to effectively address the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

The conduct of this comprehensive evaluation provides numerous lessons that will feed into future undertakings of this kind. The exercise, despite all its challenges, has proved that this approach can be successful and has the potential to help address system-wide problems and issues.

Executive summary

Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally-agreed development goals
JIU/REP/2016/5

The United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 67/226 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system on 21 December 2012. Following this, operative paragraph 8 of resolution 68/229 laid out that two pilot independent system-wide evaluations would be conducted in 2014, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources. This evaluation was one of the two evaluations[1] selected to be part of the implementation of the policy for independent system-wide evaluation of the operational activities for development[2] (the independent system-wide evaluation policy), and was approved by the General Assembly in December 2013.[3]

As the world transitions from the Millennium Development Goals to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the strengthening of national capacities for sustainable development, once again, takes centre stage. The 2015 agreement on the 2030 Agenda proposes a more extensive and integrated set of goals and indicators which will be challenging for all countries to monitor as well as to achieve. Member States are increasingly recognizing that statistics must play a more prominent role than in the past and have started reviewing capacities within the United Nations system to respond to these emerging needs.

The core purpose of the evaluation is to help the United Nations system provide stronger support for national statistical capacity development for the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.[4] The following objectives were developed in line with the independent system-wide evaluation policy:

- Objective 1: To describe the importance and evolving status of national statistical capacity
- Objective 2: To analyse the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system in support of national statistical capacity within the context of a larger international effort

[1] The second pilot is the *Meta-evaluation and synthesis of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with a particular focus on poverty eradication.*
[2] See A/68/658-E/2014/7.
[3] See General Assembly resolution 68/229.
[4] A second purpose of the pilot evaluation is to provide lessons for strengthening the mechanisms and modalities for the planning, management, conduct and use of independent system-wide evaluation. This matter will be covered in separate "lessons learned" documents by the Interim Coordination Mechanism of ISWE.

- **Objective 3: To assess, to the extent possible, the contribution of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development and the value it has added, together with the factors that can explain this role and performance**
- **Objective 4: To recommend strategic actions for strengthening the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development in the future through amendments to its role, positioning and approaches.**

Conclusions and recommendations

The following four conclusions represent the key messages that the evaluation is presenting to Member States for consideration when examining options for reform of the support from the United Nations development system in the area of national statistical capacity development. Conclusions 1 and 2 address the second evaluation objective[5] and conclusions 3 and 4 address the third objective.[6]

The recommendations follow logically from the conclusions. In formulating the recommendations, an attempt has been made to focus on broad policy issues that are relevant at a high strategic level rather than on details of the design and implementation of projects and programmes. Specifically, the recommendations are aimed at strengthening United Nations system operational support for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The recommendations address the fourth objective of the evaluation.[7]

Conclusion 1: United Nations system entities at the global, regional and country levels have made important contributions to the development of national capacities for producing statistics. The work that the United Nations system has carried out on establishing statistical standards has been highlighted as an important area of success. However, there are some challenges concerning the quality of the contribution to statistical production, specifically related to coordination of activities, the sustainability of the results and the relevance of activities to the priorities of all national stakeholders. Nonetheless, the United Nations system needs to build on its successes, address the challenges and maintain its global leadership in this area in order to be effective in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

- **Recommendation 1: The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should make national statistical capacity development a major strategic priority of the United Nations system entities addressing production, dissemination and use of official statistics, and should call on all Member States to redirect the financial resources necessary to support all three areas.**

[5] To assess, to the extent possible, the contribution of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development and the value it has added.

[6] To analyse the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system in support of national statistical capacity within the context of a larger international effort.

[7] To recommend strategic actions for strengthening the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development in the future through amendments to its role, positioning and approaches.

Conclusion 2: Although the United Nations system has helped member States to strengthen their capacities for the production of statistics, more needs to be done to operationalize the mantra of the United Nations Statistical Commission that better data leads to better lives. The United Nations system has not always recognized statistics as a national governance issue and has not done enough to promote and facilitate the use of statistics to achieve national development goals. Effective use of statistics by policymakers, civil society and the private sector is essential if countries are going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and go beyond simply monitoring progress towards the targets. This requires support for the development of national capacities to explore the wealth of data often produced by national statistical systems and to undertake deeper analysis, not just of trends but of the underlying causes of the obstacles to achieving national development goals.

- **Recommendation 2: The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, should reaffirm that the principal goal of the United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development is the use of national statistics for supporting the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and in this regard, requests United Nations system organizations to make all efforts to support achievement of this goal.**

While the United Nations system can bring strong technical skills to support the production of statistics, such production is a means to an end. The use of the statistics at the national level to support the achievement of national development goals must be recognized as the intended result of United Nations system support and the measure of its success. It is thus not a case of supporting either production or use of statistics, as the two are intertwined and have a logical linkage.

- **Recommendation 3: Executive heads of United Nations entities that work on national statistical capacity development should establish a network (a working group or task force) that will bring together the different entities' policy, programme and statistics departments in order to define how to better support more effective use of statistics by national stakeholders to achieve national development goals and should develop system-wide guidance for United Nations system entities on this issue.**

In addition to system-wide discussion at the global level, discussion and adoption of the global guidance should also take place at the regional and country levels in partnership with member States and organizations outside the United Nations system. This will ensure more appropriate guidance and modes of regional support for United Nations country teams working on strengthening capacities for more effective use of statistics. One United Nations system entity with experience both in supporting national statistical capacity development and in engaging in national strategic policy development should take the lead in managing the network.

Conclusion 3: The United Nations system is not as yet appropriately positioned to increase its contribution, and the quality of that contribution, to national statistical capacity development in the new global statistical environment. The 2030 Agenda presents challenges and opportunities that will require a more effective and efficient United Nations system response. Notwithstanding the

ongoing work of the high-level group[8] that has the potential to strengthen the United Nations system's leadership of the global statistical system, no overarching plan exists at present that clarifies the respective roles of the various United Nations system entities supporting national statistical capacity development efforts, or the division of labour between them. In addition, the level of investment in the United Nations entities may be inadequate if they are to lead the integrated United Nations system response to the emerging data revolution for sustainable development. From the year 2000 up to the present, national statistical capacity development has been one among many United Nations priorities for supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, but if the United Nations system is to be successful in regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, it should give greater importance to this area of its work and consider reviewing the mandates of the key participating United Nations entities.

- **Recommendation 4: The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, to develop a strategic framework for the next five years regarding United Nations system integrated support for national statistical capacity development at the global, regional and country levels, setting out the roles and areas of work for entities at all three levels.**

This framework should be guided by the need to leverage existing capacities and mandates at all levels[9] and to bring them together to ensure the setting-up of a comprehensive United Nations architecture to deliver integrated and holistic support to nationally-owned statistical capacity development processes. This effort would capitalize on opportunities for synergy, ensure that resources were allocated to the most appropriate level and reduce duplication and overlap. The framework should also be explicitly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It would help to align the funding, functions, governance and organizational arrangements of the United Nations system in the area of national statistical capacity development. Moreover, it would examine funding gaps to address the growing needs in this area and would look for innovative solutions to address them, possibly through pooled financing mechanisms and/or by mobilizing private sector resources.

It is important that the framework be developed through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process, not only to ensure that it is well designed but also to increase the likelihood that it will be implemented. The framework needs to ensure linkages between existing coordination mechanisms at various levels and set out clear performance criteria so that the performance of the United Nations system can be periodically assessed. Moreover, the framework must take into account what other agencies (international, regional and bilateral) are already doing. The United Nations Statistical Commission, as the United Nations intergovernmental body

[8] The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (composed of Member States and including regional and international agencies as observers) was established by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2015. It aims to establish a global partnership for sustainable development data and it reports annually to the Statistical Commission.

[9] The framework should also take into account the existing planning and reporting processes of participating United Nations entities.

bringing together all national chief statisticians, should play a leading role in developing such a plan. Relevant organizations outside the United Nations should also be involved.

Conclusion 4: At the country level, United Nations system entities are not always acting as a coordinated, coherent and integrated system when supporting national statistical capacity development. Countries frequently receive support from the United Nations system in the form of many separate initiatives, often driven by global agendas, and usually across a wide range of national partners. Although the programmatic fragmentation of the United Nations system support has been addressed (to some extent) in some countries through joint United Nations programmes, approaching national statistical capacity development as a system has, in general, been a challenge. Where there is a lack of coordination and coherence, it becomes more difficult for the United Nations system to provide broader support to member States in developing comprehensive national statistical systems that will sustain the production of statistics and their use. In this respect, United Nations resident coordinators' offices need to be strengthened with statistical capacity to promote an integrated United Nation's role in national statistical capacity development.

- **Recommendation 5: The General Assembly should ensure in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review that national statistical capacity development is a strategic area of support for all United Nations country teams, recognizing that the role will vary significantly between countries as determined by the national authorities.**

As this is a strategic area of support, the United Nations system should, where necessary, champion the development of the national statistical systems, leverage resources, and provide integrated, differentiated, context-specific support through multi-stakeholder processes. It is essential that the support from the United Nations system be undertaken in partnership with other key international organizations working in this area. The role of the United Nations system in national statistical capacity development would be clearly set out in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (or similar) under the leadership of the resident coordinator. Guidance on assessing the country-specific role of the United Nations system in the area of national statistical capacity development during the preparation of the UNDAF should be developed. In this context, system-wide support would include the support being provided from the regional and global levels. Moreover, any potential integrated and holistic support for national statistical capacity development should also leverage on, and take into account, what other international agencies are already doing in the country, and partnerships should be built as appropriate. Where agreed by partner governments, the Sustainable Development Goals framework at the country level could be the "holistic manner" to address national statistical capacity development, including the coordination issues identified by the present evaluation.

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Abbreviations

ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EMG	Evaluation Management Group
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISWE	Independent System-Wide Evaluation
KSRG	Key Stakeholder Reference Group
MICS	multiple indicator cluster survey
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	official development assistance
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
PARIS21	Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United National Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

I. Introduction

1. The present evaluation was decided upon by the General Assembly in January 2014[10] as one of two pilots[11] that were part of the implementation of the policy for independent system-wide evaluation of the operational activities for development within the United Nations system[12] (the independent system-wide evaluation policy). The core purpose of the evaluation is to help the United Nations system provide stronger support for national statistical capacity development for the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The following objectives were developed in line with the independent system-wide evaluation policy:

- Objective 1: To describe the importance and evolving status of national statistical capacity
- Objective 2: To analyse the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system in support of national statistical capacity within the context of a larger international effort
- Objective 3: To assess, to the extent possible, the contribution of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development and the value it has added, together with the factors that can explain this role and performance
- Objective 4: To recommend strategic actions for strengthening the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development in the future through amendments to its role, positioning and approaches.

2. Broad stakeholder consultations held during the design of the present evaluation led to a clearly defined scope. The evaluation covered national capacity for data collection, statistical analysis, and the use of official statistics to help achieve national development goals, and therefore pertained to the entire national statistical system. It covered all the United Nations entities involved in national statistical capacity development,[13] starting from the year 2000, with a focus on the last five years.

3. The overall approach for the evaluation was designed within extremely tight budgetary and time constraints. A more sophisticated methodology may have been possible with more budgetary resources and time, but a guiding principle was to combine simplicity and practicality while ensuring the impartiality, quality, credibility and utility of the evaluation. This approach can be seen through core elements that aim to achieve the objectives of the evaluation within the defined scope. First, the evaluation took the country level as the unit of analysis for assessing the contribution to national statistical capacity development. This also ensured the primacy of a national perspective in assessing the contribution, especially as the United Nations has no system-wide goals against which to carry

[10] See Assembly resolution 68/229.

[11] The second pilot is the meta-evaluation of the quality of United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations published from 2010 to 2014 and synthesis.

[12] See A/68/658-E/2014/7.

[13] A complete list of the 30 United Nations entities can be found in section 4 of the technical appendix.

out an assessment. Second, multiple methods for data collection were combined with a strong and wide validation process. Third, the evaluation focused on forward-looking strategic recommendations aimed at supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Two broad evaluation questions that addressed the evaluative objectives were identified, together with associated subquestions:

Question 1: What is the contribution of the United Nations system within the broader international support for national statistical capacity development?

- What is the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development outcomes (effectiveness)?
- Is the United Nations system contribution likely to help national achievement of national development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (impact)?

Where has the United Nations been the most and least successful and what are the comparative strengths of the United Nations system in this area (relevance and effectiveness)?

Question 2: What is the quality[14] of the United Nations system contribution to national statistical capacity development?

- Was the support for national statistical capacity development relevant to the needs of the country, taking account of resource constraints and competing priorities (relevance)?
- What has been the degree of sustainability of United Nations system capacity development efforts (sustainability)?
- How coherent and coordinated is the United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development (efficiency)?

4. Table 1 sets out the main data collection methods.[15] Each method used the same framework, of evaluation questions and subquestions, which facilitated analysis of the data and triangulation between methods and sources. Not all data collection methods were able to answer each of the subquestions. For example, while many of the existing evaluations that were examined addressed issues of effectiveness, some did not examine efficiency or sustainability issues in the way used by this evaluation. Nonetheless, a minimum level of data was collected to ensure the rigour of the findings. After identification of the findings, a synthesis process resulted in a small number of strategic conclusions and recommendations for taking the United Nations system forward in this area.

[14] The quality of the contribution is limited to the areas covered by the three subquestions, that is, the relevance, sustainability, coordination and coherence.

[15] A more detailed explanation of the methodology, the overall approach to conducting the evaluation, the major constraints faced and the data collection methods used can be found in section 1 of the technical appendix.

Table 1
Overview of data collection methods

Method	*Method subgroup*	*Number*
Country studies	Studies with country visit[16]	6
	Studies based on desk review[17]	10
Review of country-level evaluations	UNDAF[18] evaluations	17
	Other evaluations	6
Review of global/regional evaluations	United Nations evaluations	8
	Non-United Nations evaluations	4
Interviews with key stakeholder organizations	United Nations organizations	19
	Partner organizations	8

5. The main methodological challenge in the ISWE is to say something about the United Nations system as a whole when in reality there will inevitably be a significant variation in performance and a multitude of factors that can explain that performance in each context. This has led to the use of language such as "generally", "often" or "does not always" when referring to what the United Nations system does or how it performs. This may not be the precise language that can be found in a project evaluation but was inevitable in an evaluation looking at 30 entities working in over 100 countries.

6. Towards the end of the evaluation process a simple validation survey was sent to producers and users of statistics in 131 programme countries. The survey presented the evaluation findings and asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed. Eighty (80) fully completed responses were received from 43[19] countries. Eighty-one percent of total respondents (81%) are producers and 19% are users of statistics. The results of this survey validated the findings but also indicated the wide variation in perceptions about the performance of the United Nations system in this area. The findings inevitably do not apply to all United Nations systems entities in all their work, in all contexts. Rather they represent a statement of an issue that is common enough across the United Nations system that it deserves attention and action to address it.

7. A small Evaluation Management Group (EMG) was established in April 2015 and was chaired by a JIU inspector. It comprised staff from the evaluation offices of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The EMG was accountable for

[16] Benin, Cambodia, El Salvador, Republic of Moldova, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago.
[17] Albania, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Fiji, Jordan, Liberia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia.
[18] United Nations Development Assistance Framework: the programme document drawn up between a government and the United Nations country team that describes the collective actions and strategies of the United Nations that are carried out with a view to achieving national development.
[19] Six of the 43 countries were involved in the country studies of the evaluation.

the professional and technical quality of the evaluation. Its specific roles included enhancing technical rigour and ensuring quality on all aspects of the evaluation.

8. Following a stakeholder mapping exercise, an ad hoc advisory group, which later was expanded as a Key Stakeholder Reference Group (KSRG) was put in place in April 2015.[20] Its main role according to the ISWE policy was to enhance the substantive and strategic value of the evaluation. It guided the focus, scope and approach, and made comments on the design and the draft evaluation report in order to enhance its quality and utility.

9. As set out in the independent system-wide evaluation (ISWE) policy,[21] the evaluation was conducted by independent evaluators, led by an evaluation team leader and supported by a senior statistical specialist, regional evaluators and research assistants. Two senior advisors, who between them had expertise in statistics, national statistical capacity development and the use of statistics for policymaking, were contracted to work on an intermittent basis as needed. Table 2 on the following page shows the main milestones and the target dates for completion.

10. The present report is accompanied by a technical appendix that contains more details on the context and on the evidence that backs up the findings presented in the main evaluation report. The technical appendix can be found on the JIU website.

11. The structure of the present report is as follows:

- Chapter 2 sets out the context in which the evaluation is being conducted. It clarifies some basic concepts concerning national statistical capacity development, provides an overview of international support in this area and examines the changing global context.
- Chapter 3 sets out the findings related to the two evaluation questions and related subquestions.
- Chapter 4 sets out the key messages in the form of strategic conclusions from the review of the recent past and takes the process forward with strategic recommendations for the United Nations system to support national statistical capacity development within the environment that exists now.

[20] While the Evaluation Management Group and the key stakeholder reference group were being officially organized, an ad hoc advisory group of key stakeholders was established to start the evaluation.

[21] See paragraph 48.

Table 2
Implementation time frame

Phase	*Time frame*
Phase 1: Stakeholder consultations, scoping and initial design	April-July 2015
Phase 2: Redesign, and recruitment of evaluation team	August-October 2015
Phase 3: Data collection and analysis	November 2015-April 2016
Phase 4: Validation, finalization of the evaluation report and publication	April-June 2016
Phase 5: Dialogue, presentation, and decision-making	May-October 2016
Phase 6: Dissemination and presentation to Economic and Social Council	September-December 2016

12. In accordance with article 11.2 of the JIU statute, the present report was finalized after consultation among the inspectors so as to test its conclusions and recommendations against the collective wisdom of the Unit.

13. In order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report and monitoring thereof by the JIU as required in the ISWE policy, annex I contains a table indicating whether the report is submitted to the organizations concerned for action or for information. The table identifies the recommendations that are relevant to each organization, specifying whether they require a decision by the legislative or governing bodies or can be acted upon by the organization's executive head.

II. National statistical capacity

14. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were endorsed by the General Assembly on 29 January 2014, during its 68th session, and provide political recognition of official statistics as a public good. In introducing the Principles, the United Nations Statistics Division reminds readers that statistics are essential for sustainable economic, environmental and social development.

15. National policymakers need statistics to help them identify areas where policies need to be developed (e.g. by monitoring trends), for more in-depth analysis that will lead to policy reform, for monitoring policy implementation and for evaluating whether the policy reforms worked and why. Better, more relevant and more timely statistics should lead to better, more evidence-based policies that are more likely to achieve national development goals. Citizens of countries need statistics to help hold policymakers accountable, as well as for information about the society in which they live, and businesses need to make evidence-based business decisions. Statistics will also help citizens advocate for change, often through civil society groups. However, it is not only policymakers and citizens who constitute the demand for statistics. The production of statistics faces further demands, often competing, that will influence the pattern of production and the priorities of the

national producers and users. These include demands by international organizations for their own programme design and monitoring needs, as well as for advocacy and for global/regional monitoring.

A. National statistical capacity development

16. Capacity development has been an essential part of the work of the United Nations development system for the past two decades. The 2012 quadrennial comprehensive policy review stressed that "capacity development is a core function of the United Nations development system and one of the key interrelated principles that must be applied at the country level".[22] The latter part of that quotation refers to the fact that capacity development is one of the five programming principles of the UNDAF that should be universally applied by the United Nations system in its operational work.[23] Along with other structures supporting good governance and accountability, national statistical systems require capacity development in order to be able to support the achievement of national development goals.

17. At the apex of the global statistical system is the United Nations Statistical Commission, a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council that is substantively serviced by the Statistics Division. The Statistical Commission[24] assists the Council in promoting the development of national statistics and the improvement of their comparability, and the coordination of the statistical work of specialized agencies, among other things. The mandate of the Statistical Commission is both broad and germane to the issue of national capacity-building.

18. Most but not all countries have a national statistical system, which produces economic statistics (national accounts, prices, balance of payments, government finance), sociodemographic statistics (population, health, education, labour), agricultural and environmental statistics, and multi-domain statistics, on behalf of the national government. A national statistical system consists of various government bodies: typically, a national statistical office which serves as the core statistics producer and coordinator, and other government ministries, departments and agencies which have the responsibility of producing and disseminating official statistics in specific sectors or fields. It should be stressed that in order to fulfil its mandate, a national statistical system requires a strong legal underpinning, common standards and good coordination between data producers to enable it to produce high-quality statistics, as well as a strong relationship with its data suppliers and data users. A broad definition of a national statistical system also includes data suppliers and data users.

19. Making use of the United Nations Development Group's (UNDG) generic model for capacity development, national statistical capacity development can be described as the process of changes at the levels of individuals, organizations and enabling environments in a national statistical system through which the system obtains, strengthens and maintains its capabilities to set and achieve its own

[22] See General Assembly resolution 67/226, para. 60.

[23] In the new interim UNDAF guidelines released on 23 May 2016, capacity development no longer appears as one of the programming principles.

[24] The Commission consists of Member States but other United Nations entities attend the sessions together with non-United Nations organizations working in the area of statistics.

statistics development objectives over time. Capacity development is needed for both the vertical capacities (sectoral or technical, such as surveys) as well as for the horizontal capacities (cross-cutting capacities that enable the use of technical skills, i.e. the basic infrastructure of the national statistical system).

20. Since national statistical capacity development requires changes at multiple levels (at the individual, institutional, and enabling environment levels), various national statistical capacity development programmes have been implemented to strengthen the capability of national statistical systems to meet the expectations of their stakeholders. These programmes are aimed at improving the knowledge, skills and competence of national statistical system staff and leadership, supporting the collection of primary data, the production and dissemination of official statistics, the development or refinement of national statistical standards and classification systems, and the improvement of adherence to international statistical standards and practices, as well as at improving the enabling environment for an effective national statistical system (in such diverse areas as statistical legislation, statistical infrastructure and statistical coordination).

B. International support for national statistical capacity development

21. The increasing demand for the production of official statistics has been driven by the needs of countries to demonstrate results in relation to national development plans. The international attention placed on the Millennium Development Goals, and their successors the Sustainable Development Goals, has also resulted in an increased awareness of the need to strengthen official statistics in order to monitor these global development goals. Decision-makers in the public arena, the development community and public policy stakeholders have increasingly recognized the role of official statistics as inputs into management for development results, for improved governance and for greater development effectiveness. While there has been an increase in the production of statistics since 2000, especially of indicators to monitor the Millennium Development Goals, there remain serious challenges to monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.[25]

22. External support for national statistical capacity development has been relatively small, with the share of official development assistance (ODA) for statistics ranging from around a fifth to a third of 1 per cent (0.19-0.33 per cent) in the period from 2006 to 2013.[26] As at 2013, donor support for statistics development was estimated at $448 million, a mere 0.24 per cent of ODA. Estimates of the required additional investment in statistics to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals vary significantly, but one study led by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network suggests at least $100 million to $200 million per year of additional ODA.[27] It should be kept in mind that funding is only part of the solution

[25] For almost a third of the Millennium Development Goals indicators, fewer than one half of reporting countries had data available. See Shuang Chen et al., "Towards a post-2015 framework that counts: developing national statistical capacity", Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) discussion paper No. 1 (November 2013).

[26] PARIS21, *Partner Report on Support to Statistics* (2015).

[27] Jessica Espey et al., *Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development* (New York).

to capacity development; the attrition of the very limited number of professional statisticians to the private sector and international organizations is frequently a challenge to capacity development, as are local administrative and legal restrictions on the activities of statistical agencies. Moreover, although some investments in national statistical systems require significant financing, important work in capacity development, coordination, convening, advocating or facilitating the setting of standards does not always require such investments.

23. The three biggest supporters of statistical capacity development outside the United Nations are the European Union, the World Bank and the Department for International Development (United Kingdom).[28] Other multilateral development banks also play an important role, especially regional development banks. In addition, organizations such as Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) play a significant role in supporting coordination of the efforts, and in assisting low-income countries to prepare or update their national strategy for the development of statistics. Around 30 United Nations system entities interact with parts of national statistical systems; these include regional commissions and specialized agencies as well as funds and programmes.[29] According to a 2015 survey of United Nations resident coordinators, conducted for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process,[30] 116 United Nations country teams[31] engage in statistical activities, and of the 116, 111 were engaged in statistical capacity development of some sort.

24. A mapping of activities of United Nations system entities shows that the United Nations system provides a wide range of different support to national statistical systems for national statistical capacity development.[32] Assistance has been given for skills enhancement at the individual level (e.g. through training activities, workshops, technical/expert meetings and study visits) that transfers knowledge on statistics in a wide range of thematic areas (especially social, economic, environmental and cross-cutting statistics). In some cases, funds from the development community are provided or leveraged to support member States in carrying out primary data collection activities (e.g. population censuses, agriculture censuses and household surveys) with a view to increasing the quantity of official statistics. At the institutional and enabling environment levels, the United Nations also offers norms, standards and tools as well as assistance to increase the quality of statistical outputs and to provide a mechanism for achieving better cross-country comparability of official statistics.

25. The key organization in the coordination effort is the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which was established in 2002 and reports

[28] PARIS21, *Partner Report on Support to Statistics* (2015).

[29] A full list of the United Nations system entities involved in national statistical capacity development can be found in section 4.1 of the technical appendix. They include the statistics and population divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the five regional commissions, 11 specialized agencies, and 12 funds, programmes and other entities.

[30] Development Operations Coordination Office, "Analysis of data coming from United Nations country teams: UNDOCO analysis of 2014 and 2015 information management system (IMS) data" (2015).

[31] 116 of the 122 who responded, out of a possible maximum of 131.

[32] More information on the work of the United Nations system entities in this area can be found in the technical appendix.

annually to the United Nations Statistical Commission. The members of the Committee[33] are the chief statisticians of international and supranational organizations, whose mandate includes providing international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities, and whose organizations have a permanently embedded statistical service and regular contacts with countries. In addition, since 2007, a subset of the Committee, namely the group of United Nations chief statisticians, has met regularly, convened by the Statistics Division. Strengthened in 2014, the group of United Nations chief statisticians comprises the statistical services of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the Secretariat, whose mandate includes the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities.

C. The changing context for national statistical capacity

26. The final phase of the Millennium Development Goals era and the process of preparing for a new agenda led to renewed interest in the quality and availability of statistics. By mid-2012, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had established the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Panel's 2013 report — *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development* — first coined the term "data revolution", specifically, a data revolution for sustainable development, that would include "a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to people and governments".[34]

27. In August 2014, the Secretary-General established the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, comprised of 24 experts from civil society, the private sector, academia, governments and international organizations. The group was tasked with advising the Secretary-General on measures to be taken to close data gaps and strengthen national statistical capacities. It was also expected to assess new opportunities linked to innovation, technical progress and the surge of new public and private data providers to support and complement conventional statistical systems and strengthen accountability at the global, regional and national levels.[35] The resulting report, "A world that counts: mobilizing the data revolution for sustainable development", was presented to the Secretary-General in November 2014 and highlighted two major global challenges in connection with the current state of data:

- The challenge of invisibility (gaps in what we know from data, and when we find out)
- The challenge of inequality (gaps between those who have and do not have information, and what they need to know to make their own decisions).

28. In September 2015, the General Assembly adopted[36] a new set of universal goals that came into effect on 1 January 2016 and will guide all countries,

[33] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accsub-public/members.htm.

[34] This and remaining quotes in this chapter are from chapter 4 of the report *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*.

[35] See http://www.unglobalpulse.org/IEAG-Data-Revolution-Report-A-World-That-Counts.

[36] See Assembly resolution 70/1.

developed and developing alike, over the next 15 years. The 17 goals and 169 targets are "integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities".[37] Each government will set its own national targets and decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated in national planning processes, policies and strategies. The goals and targets will be followed up on and reviewed using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by member States. The global indicator framework, agreed upon by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016, is expected to be adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in line with existing mandates.

29. Given that member States found great difficulty in reporting on the much more limited Millennium Development Goals, reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals will require a step change in the quantity, quality and means of delivery of the support from the international community. Moreover, capturing dimensions of inequality, sustainability and governance will provide further challenges to national statistical systems in all member States, not just in developing countries.

III. Findings on the United Nations system role and contribution

30. This chapter addresses the two evaluation questions and the related subquestions. These findings are based on analysis of the evidence across a number of different sources (as set out in chapter I). Clearly, the data collection process identified many good examples to illustrate the work of the United Nations system in national statistical capacity development. Some of these are included in the technical appendix, but the majority are very context-specific. A key approach has been to triangulate the data from the country studies — which often captures the overall contribution of the United Nations system, including its support for horizontal capacities — with the evaluations of global programmes and efforts.

A. Evaluation question 1: What is the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development?

Finding 1: At the country level, the initiatives of United Nations system entities generally make important contributions to national capacity development for the production of statistics.

31. The body of evidence from the country studies undertaken for the present evaluation, as well as from other evaluations at the country, regional and global levels, shows that United Nations system entities often make important contributions to national statistical capacity development. The country studies reveal that there is much appreciation of the initiatives of United Nations entities in

[37] Ibid., para. 55.

supporting national statistical capacity development (Bangladesh, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Jordan, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova, Swaziland, and Trinidad and Tobago, among others). In general, what it does, it does well, and this perception comes as much from government ministries, departments and agencies as it does from the national statistical offices. This is not to say that the support cannot be improved, and some issues related to the quality of the support will be examined through the second evaluation question.

32. The secondary evidence collected from completed evaluations was consistent with the country studies. Out of the 20 recent UNDAF evaluation reports examined for the present evaluation, the vast majority present positive views about the work of United Nations system entities in the area of national statistical capacity development. Evaluations of the work of regional commissions in supporting national statistical capacity development have also been positive. The 2015 evaluation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS),[38] noted that ECLAC had supported the strengthening and harmonization of statistics across the region and the improvement of methodologies in relation to national accounts, poverty, gender and other social indicators. It found that the work "has strengthened statistics at the regional, subregional and national levels. ECLAC also helped to improve member States' capacity to collect and analyse census data". However, the evaluation found that ECLAC had not been effective enough in enhancing statistical capacity in the Caribbean, which had been identified as a priority.

33. Other recent OIOS evaluations of regional commission work were positive too. The 2016 evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) noted that the importance of the Commission went beyond the region and that some outputs originally developed for the region had been adopted worldwide, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Moreover, the Conference of European Statisticians today includes active participation from nine countries outside the ECE region. The 2016 OIOS evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) noted that ESCWA had, in a number of areas, including statistics, "played a catalytic role by bringing government officials together to exchange experiences and to discuss relevant technical issues, challenges and policy options".[39] The evaluation also noted that when it came to strengthening national statistical capacities (among other areas of work), ESCWA was "well positioned to provide the type of assistance its member States will need to be successful in transitioning from conflict and unrest to political, economic and social stability".[40]

34. The 2011 OIOS evaluation of the work of the United Nations Statistics Division reported that several stakeholders had suggested that efforts by the Statistics Division to build national-level capacity had resulted in an improvement in the quality of the data submitted by some countries and hence in the accuracy of the indicators overall.[41]

[38] See E/AC.51/2015/6.
[39] See para. 27.
[40] See para. 54.
[41] See para. 24.

A more recent internal audit by OIOS[42] used a survey of members of the United Nations Statistical Commission to assess the substantive support provided to member States. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, the Division received an average score of 4.

35. Moreover, global assessments of specific themes were also positive. The 2016 UNFPA evaluation of its census work found that, overall, the contribution of UNFPA support to the 2010 census round had been largely positive, with the performance in terms of contribution to strengthening national capacities for the production and availability of data being without question.[43] One factor identified in the evaluation was that UNFPA support often featured good quality assurance mechanisms for the census, including quality assurance related to census governance. Although national capacity development is not the primary objective of the UNICEF multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS), a survey conducted for the 2009 UNICEF MICS evaluation[44] indicated that the MICS had contributed to capacity development for data collection and use in the country.[45]

Finding 2: The United Nations system has not always done enough to promote national demand for statistics and to support capacities for greater use of statistics for national policymaking,[46] improved accountability to citizens and better business decisions by the private sector.

36. As noted in the previous chapter, the use of statistics for more effective policymaking, improved accountability of national governments to citizens, and better business decisions by the private sector is important for sustainable development. Producing statistics but not using them effectively is not only an inefficient utilization of resources but also represents a missed opportunity to develop more evidence-based policies.

37. Activities aimed at addressing the use of statistics for national policymaking and for accountability to citizens (i.e. the national demand) were often included in the design stage of United Nations system national statistical capacity development interventions. This was most common in broad programmes for national statistical capacity development (for example, Republic of Moldova, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and so on), which were often joint programmes of several United Nations entities. However, these programmes have not always been implemented (Swaziland), or the component promoting greater use of statistics has been found to be a challenging area of an otherwise good joint United Nations programme (Republic of Moldova). There are, however, good examples of the contribution of capacity development activities by

[42] Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Audit of the management of the statistics subprogramme and related technical cooperation projects in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs" (report 2016/032).

[43] UNFPA Evaluation Office, "Evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)".

[44] UNICEF, "Evaluation of UNICEF multiple indicator cluster surveys, round 3 (MICS3)" (2009).

[45] Ibid., table IV.4, p. 63. Specifically, 88 per cent of representatives of government agencies who participated in the survey and 97 per cent of those from implementing agencies.

[46] The term "policymaking", as used here, refers to the whole policy cycle, from identification to design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and amendment.

the United Nations system when projects link national statistical capacity development directly to use, such as the development of a specific policy (for example, an agricultural census being used to develop a new agricultural policy).

38. Use of statistics is difficult to assess, and it is especially difficult to make a causal linkage between a capacity development effort and a change in policy. Discussions on use moreover sometimes do not distinguish between the different types of use, and in some cases see monitoring as the ultimate objective. There has been some support for better understanding of statistics to promote use, for example the work of ECE on metadata for monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals. Other United Nations system efforts to enhance national use have been to promote the homogenization and comparability of statistics at the subregional, regional and global levels, and the sharing of microdata in standard formats.

39. Interviewees in a number of countries studied as part of the present evaluation raised the issue of the lack of a culture of statistical use in government, although the findings vary considerably between countries and even within governments. Where there is a lack of a culture of using statistics is precisely where capacity development support is needed, and not just national capacity but also of the United Nations country team to assess the complex relationships and incentives that determine use and to design support accordingly. It also seems that in some countries, the national Millennium Development Goals reports have stimulated discussion on statistics that has led to improvements in use.

40. Global thematic evaluations provide more insights into the issue. The 2014 MICS evaluation, by UNICEF,[47] found some improvement in this area, noting specifically that "the landscape of MICS data use is more widely varied and robust than that found in the prior evaluation". MICS data are increasingly being used in multi-country analyses that utilize common conceptual frameworks to examine issues such as child poverty and children out of school. Requesters of MICS data sets described analyses with varied purposes that spanned a wide range of analytical topics, with health, gender, nutrition and education heading the list.

41. The 2016 UNFPA evaluation of its census work[48] was less positive and found that "the 2010 census round has had a pre-eminent focus on enhancing the production of census-related data, placing disproportionately less attention on data dissemination, analysis and use in policymaking". So, while population censuses are invaluable tools for monitoring progress in development indicators such as those found in the Millennium Development Goals — census data not only provides the baseline for most indicators, such as the population size of specific groups, but also generates information for indicators on gender equality, education, health and access to natural resources — UNFPA has not yet exploited the full potential of combining census data with specific surveys or new sources of data.

42. The 2011 ILO evaluation of the statistics component of its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour[49] noted that although the quality of the research products was perceived as very high, some indications point to a very

[47] UNICEF, "Evaluation of the multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS): round 4" (August 2014).

[48] UNFPA Evaluation Office, "Evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)".

[49] ILO Evaluation Unit, "Cluster evaluation of ILO-IPEC research and statistics (SIMPOC) projects 2007-2010" (2011).

moderate academic uptake. The 2016 FAO report on the Corporate Outcome Assessment 2015[50] points to a limited contribution to the use of statistics. Regarding the FAO contribution to the use of statistics for evidence-based decisions in the planning and management of the agricultural and natural resource sectors in the period from 2014 to 2016, the report estimates that in approximately 20 per cent of countries, FAO made no visible contribution. In approximately 63 per cent of countries its contribution was moderate, and only in 17 per cent of countries did it contribute significantly.

Finding 3: The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and statistical standards are much appreciated by member States, as member States actively participate in the development of the standards. The support for knowledge-sharing in connection with using these standards is also appreciated.

43. The setting of statistical standards and the sharing of knowledge in order to use them was the area of support from the United Nations system that was the most appreciated by member States, according to the country studies, as well as by relevant key stakeholder interviewees. The ability of member States to participate in the setting of these standards was given by some as a reason why they were both appreciated and used.

44. The role in setting standards is becoming increasingly important, as national statistical offices engage with the data revolution and are presented with increased opportunities to use private sector sources of data. Those working in a national statistical system need support to know how to deal with these new opportunities, and standards and principles are a way of helping in that effort. In practice, this means continuing the work of utilizing big data for official statistics. Moreover, the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda — a departure from the Millennium Development Goals — means that standards are even more important, as they are also intended to be universal.

45. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics — originally an ECE initiative — is a powerful tool for United Nations country teams to use in their engagement with national authorities and in their advocacy for strengthening national statistical systems. It is also an overarching framework that can be used as the basis for supporting national statistical capacity development. An important principle (the first) notes the importance of transparency, stating that official statistics should be "made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information".

Finding 4: In supporting national statistical capacity development, the United Nations system does not always effectively use the generic comparative strengths that it often has at the country level.

46. The United Nations system's generic comparative strengths, such as its presence on the ground combined with long-term commitment and usually close relationships

[50] FAO, "Corporate outcome assessment 2015: main results" (2016 draft).

with governments and civil society, make it well positioned for undertaking advocacy to strengthen the statistical system, for supporting the national statistical system enabling environment, and for promoting the effective use of statistics among policymakers and citizens. In addition, the United Nations system operates in the majority of sectors and has often been found to play a role linking national statistical offices with partners from ministries, departments and agencies. Its convening power means that it is often important for bringing together the wide range of national participants in the national statistical system, not just the range of producers but also users and suppliers of statistics in the private sector. The multi-stakeholder approaches used by the United Nations system allow it to play a convening role with international partners as well.

47. In-country presence means that relationships can be developed on an ongoing basis and not just through one-off efforts such as when preparing a national strategy for the development of statistics. These comparative strengths are not, however, generally being exploited. While the United Nations system has a clear comparative strength, United Nations country teams are not provided with the tools to navigate the complex regional and global statistical architectures and to act holistically as a system in an efficient and effective manner. There are no formal linkages between the country teams and the statistical divisions of the United Nations regional commissions and generally no linkages with the United Nations Statistics Division.

Finding 5: The United Nations system has not always been able to address national statistical capacity development in a holistic manner, to address the national statistical system as a whole. In addition, it has not always been strategic and catalytic in leveraging its limited financial resources and promoting such broad holistic support where necessary.

48. Addressing the national statistical system as a whole, and specifically, ensuring the establishment of the fundamental infrastructure of a national statistical system, is essential, if the system is to produce high-quality statistics on time and make them available in a useful manner. Statistical and physical infrastructure, such as business registers, sampling frames, vital registration systems, and classification schemes, as well as the requisite information and communications technology (ICT) equipment for data capture, processing and analysis, are essential. A serious problem faced by many national statistical systems has been the extremely limited budgets, which constrain even the maintenance of statistical infrastructure, let alone the expansion and development of official statistics.

49. While the United Nations system has produced good guidance on issues such as business processes (the work of ECE is important in this area), it generally does not have the resources to finance the large-scale investments that are often required to strengthen the statistical infrastructure. Yet the United Nations system's technical capacity, combined with its presence on the ground and other strengths at the country level, means that it is often an attractive partner to work with for national statistical capacity development. It should be in a position to make a differentiated response to each country situation, which could lead to strong partnerships with organizations that do not have such a presence and/or relationship.

50. Moreover, the United Nations has often been successful at leveraging global resources for important partnerships where it has appropriate technical capacities. Examples include population censuses, agricultural surveys and civil registration. The United Nations system cannot finance expensive elements of the statistical infrastructure such as civil registration systems — often taken on by the World Bank — but can play a major technical assistance role in partnership with development partners.[51] At the country level, although the United Nations system has also been successful in mobilizing resources for specific vertical initiatives, such as for censuses (Ethiopia, Jordan), it has often not been able to leverage resources or partnerships at the country level to address the horizontal aspects of the national statistical system where necessary. This is not the case in all countries, where either domestic resources are adequate or where major donors are supporting the national statistical system as a whole. However, as regards the countries examined in the present evaluation, it is clear both that additional resources are generally required to ensure an effective statistical system, and that the United Nations system has not always played an adequate role in working with the national authorities to mobilize resources.

B. Evaluation question 2: What is the quality of the United Nations system contribution to national statistical capacity development?

Finding 6: The United Nations system contribution is generally relevant to the work of the national statistical office and the relevant ministries, departments and agencies of the government, but it does not always address the highest-priority needs of national policymakers.

51. Successive comprehensive policy reviews of the United Nations system have confirmed the primacy of national ownership of the activities that the system undertakes. The 2016 report of the Secretary-General on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review[52] makes the issue clearer, noting that "it is essential to ensure tailor-made solutions for different countries, strongly anchored in national leadership and ownership and based on their individual capacities, needs and priorities".[53]

52. Country studies show that national statistical offices and statistics producers in the ministries, departments and agencies generally find the work of the United Nations system to be relevant to their needs, recognizing the areas where the United Nations system entities operate and the resource and capacity constraints faced. Users affirm that they have unfulfilled needs in regard to data but understand that the United Nations system cannot provide all their needs. The resources of the United Nations system address not only the social sectors but in some countries the productive sectors too, although these gaps are more often filled by other development partners.

[51] For example, FAO and the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.
[52] See A/71/63-E/2016/8.
[53] Ibid., para. 277.

53. The United Nations system helps member States fulfil global and regional reporting obligations and therefore emphasizes this area of work. While such assistance is important, in the context of limited resources for a national statistical system, United Nations system support may not reflect the highest national priorities. United Nations entity activities at the national level utilize scarce human resources in the national statistical system that they seek to strengthen, which can sometimes weaken the production of statistics for other national policy priorities. How relevant this is will depend on whether the national statistical office sees its role primarily as a reporter or a supplier of statistics to national users. This, in turn, depends on whether there is a clearly articulated and realistic demand for statistics. In some cases, the United Nations system has created demand, addressing issues that may not feature in national statistical strategies but that are nonetheless important, for example surveys on violence against women.

54. Although monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals provided an opportunity to support statistics development in member States, interventions on national statistical capacity development have tended to be piecemeal (e.g. support for carrying out sample surveys), rather than focusing on the long-term requirements of the national statistical system, which include the necessary statistical infrastructure (especially ICT support systems for quality checks and the effective communication of statistics). The problem faced by some United Nations system entities is that resources are available for certain global or regional initiatives and the funds are not fungible. In other words, it is not easy to divert resources to genuine national priorities. When undertaking regional training, an attempt is usually made to address the demands of as many countries in the region as possible. Inevitably, these may not always be the priorities of individual national governments. The issue concerns the nature of the funding of the United Nations development system and the high degree of dependence on non-core/earmarked resources which, not being predictable and sustainable financing, tends to lead to a piecemeal approach to United Nations system support.

55. The UNFPA evaluation of its census work[54] noted that UNFPA had "a clear positive role in strengthening national leadership and ownership of the census by encouraging participation and engagement of all relevant national stakeholders in the census process (though with a focus on the central government)". Consultation had been uneven across stakeholder groups within countries, one reason being the absence of corporate guidance on minimum standards for census governance mechanisms. The evaluation also noted, however, that there were risks associated with this approach when relied upon excessively, or when the demand-driven approach was taken to an extreme: firstly, UNFPA's advisory role may be undermined, for example when providing innovative ideas, and secondly, the UNFPA support may focus on short-term ad hoc responses rather than on medium- to long-term plans and strategies such as capacity development.

56. The 2014 evaluation by UNICEF of the MICS[55] found that the survey programme, as represented at the midpoint of the fourth round, demonstrated a considerable ability to adapt, within the confines of its stated objective of generating quality, internationally comparable data. Nonetheless, the evaluation also found that

[54] UNFPA Evaluation Office, "Evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)".

[55] UNICEF, "Evaluation of the multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS): round 4" (August 2014).

several upper-middle-income countries with relatively strong statistical systems cited difficulties with a lack of flexibility within the MICS platform, specifically with the need to adhere to standardized processes and products. For example, in regard to the standard report structure, respondents stated: "we are not interested in the rigid report", and "we were told that our own interests had to wait until later; another report at a later time".[56] In addition, it was noted in the evaluation that several interviewees made the connection between a feeling of "ownership" of the data and the subsequent use of those data.

Finding 7: United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development often finds ensuring sustainability of the results to be a challenge. There is often inadequate assessment of the challenges and risks associated with sustainability concerns, particularly where globally driven statistical tools (for example, surveys) are transferred to national contexts.

57. Sustainability is extremely important if the long-term goals are to be achieved. Here, sustainability refers to the sustainability of the results to which the United Nations system contributes in enhancing national capacity, rather than to the sustainability of the interventions themselves, although the two are clearly often related. There are many dimensions of sustainability as it relates to capacity development, for example staff turnover, predictability of funding, or use of national capacity and systems. Sustainability is a challenge to all capacity-building efforts and not just in the area of statistical systems.

58. The sustainability of the capacity development results to which the United Nations system contributes is also difficult to identify. The country studies found that some of the challenges to sustainable capacity development faced by the United Nations system in this area — such as staff turnover, lack of institutionalization of training capacity, and uncertainty of financial resources — are common to most efforts to support capacity development. Overall, the evidence from the evaluation country studies suggests that sustainability is a concern but that performance varies significantly in this respect. This is a similar finding to that in the UNFPA evaluation of its census work, which found uneven success in this area.

59. Often the failure to ensure sustainability by one project is masked by another project doing similar things. Adequate risk analysis concerning sustainability, including assessing the realities of national budgets and understanding national budget cycles, is also important in explaining the factors behind the sustainability of results. Sometimes, sustainability is beyond the control of the United Nations system entity involved, such as when a change in government results in a change of priorities. Equally, taking short-term approaches when a long-term view is needed often results from donor pressure for short-term results and reporting procedures. And while the government resources available for the statistical sector may lead to unpredictable funding, the fact that many national statistical systems rely heavily on donor support adds another layer of unpredictability that can impact negatively on the sustainability of results. Where country ownership is strong (e.g. in Ethiopia and Malaysia), inputs

[56] Lessons from the evaluation were used to adapt the MICS for the remaining surveys in the fourth round and for the fifth round.

from various development partners can be coordinated by the government authorities to ensure that short-term inputs complement national efforts.

60. Most, if not all, of the above relates to the generic challenges to sustainable capacity development that are found across all areas of intervention. Many are as problematic for the national authorities that are aiming to increase capacity as they are for the international community that is supporting these endogenous efforts. There are, however, several sustainability issues that are specific to national statistical capacity development, including the lack of support to the development of the fundamental statistical infrastructure. Another issue specific to national statistical capacity development is the emphasis on short-term support through surveys, when long-term investment in administrative systems and other data sources is more sustainable. Only recently has there been an increase in the support for and promotion of systems for the registration of vital statistics. In addition, the rapidly changing statistical environment means that both national staff who work for the national statistical system and the staff of the international organizations and the consultants who support them need to be reskilled. Finally, all support to national statistical capacity development needs to take into account the absorptive capacity of the various elements of the national statistical system.

Finding 8: Global coordination mechanisms are not linked to the United Nations country level coordination mechanism and are therefore not grounded in the realities of the country level.

61. Strong coordination is one of the principles governing international statistical activities: coordination of international statistical programmes is essential to strengthen the quality, coherence and governance of international statistics and to avoid duplication of work. It is directly related to efficiency in the use of limited human and financial resources. In this context, coherence is defined as adopting the same definitions, approaches and concepts, while coordination is defined as communication for reducing fragmentation, avoiding overlaps and building on potential synergies between activities.

62. Coordination and coherence are made more challenging by the complexity of the global statistical architecture and the myriad of participants at the national, regional and global levels. With about 30 United Nations entities involved in national statistical capacity development, there is clearly a challenge to coordinating system activities, especially when the entities have different governance structures and physical locations. The issue of different estimates at the country level is an illustration of the problem, as is the proliferation of global and regional indicator databases. The 2011 OIOS evaluation of the United Nations Statistics Division noted that: "The Statistics Division illustrates the type of activity the United Nations does well, but the Organization has yet to 'deliver as one' on statistics". While improvements appear to have been made, the conclusion remains valid today.

63. Global coherence is strengthened through the coordination work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities[57] as well as the meetings of the chief statisticians of the United Nations system. There are, however, no specific

[57] Although the increasingly important global funds, philanthropic organizations and the private sector are excluded.

country-level coordination mechanisms for the United Nations system beyond the generic ones through the resident coordinator system and the UNDAF. There are also only weak linkages between the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the country-level coordination mechanism (apart from the opportunity for the Committee to report to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB)). Agreements at the centre do not necessarily trickle down to the country level, and the complexity of the international statistical architecture does not make it easy for those involved in programming operational activities at the country level to undertake meaningful coordination.

Finding 9: Coordination is often a problem at the country level and United Nations system work on national statistical capacity is often fragmented.

64. Results from the 2015 quadrennial comprehensive policy review survey of programme country governments[58] clearly indicate that the UNDAF is not enough to ensure good coordination at the operational stage, and in this respect, governments have urged concerted follow-up through such means as joint sectoral workplans. The large amount of statistical work undertaken by the United Nations across all areas of an UNDAF often gives the appearance of its support for national statistical capacity development being fragmented. This may not be the case if there is a strong national statistical strategy in place that brings together all the elements of the United Nations system support under a coherent framework. Such strategies do not yet exist in all countries,[59] and while they may facilitate better coordination with the United Nations system where they do exist, efforts still need to be made to address fragmentation in their absence.

65. A number of United Nations country teams have attempted to bring the activities related to statistics together in the form of a joint United Nations programme (e.g. the Republic of Moldova, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe). While this can promote coordination, it may not capture all the United Nations system activities, especially those initiated at the regional and global levels. The degree to which the work of the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations regional statistics divisions is coordinated with that of other United Nations entities at the country level varies by region and country but often appears to be weak. There are examples where United Nations resident coordinators have been unaware of country participation in regional events or even of United Nations Statistics Division capacity development activities or events in the country.

66. The nature of United Nations system financing is that not all activities included in the UNDAF are funded. This is especially a problem in middle-income countries, where the core allocations to funds and programmes that can act as a catalyst for mobilizing additional resources are smaller and where there are fewer donors to provide these additional resources. This can lead to coordination problems where there are expectations of support in one or more areas which may not come for some time or

[58] See http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/qcpr/pdf/qcpr_2016-rcsurvey-report.pdf.

[59] According to the PARIS21 January 2016 National Strategies for the Development of Statistics progress report, just under half of least developed, low- and lower-middle-income countries are currently implementing a strategy.

may not come at all. For example, the comprehensive joint programme developed by the United Nations in Swaziland was not implemented due to a lack of funds.

67. There are a number of theme groups established for monitoring and evaluating the UNDAF that may also cover statistics but which by their nature are focused on the internal demands for data. Nonetheless, coordination of inputs into surveys is often good, but beyond that, evidence from the country studies shows that there is often a need for greater effort in this area. The Republic of Moldova provided an example where a United Nations joint programme (with UNDP as the lead entity) was able to help with coordination even though not all of the United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development had gone through the programme.[60] A specific factor here was the role of the programme manager, who provided significant support to the national statistical office in this area, beyond the programme and beyond the United Nations system. Clearly, the responsibility for coordination is with the national authorities, and the United Nations system needs to find a balance between its own coordination process and supporting national counterparts in undertaking coordination activities over the long term.

68. The proliferation of data dissemination platforms presents coordination challenges to which the United Nations system contributes. One national statistical office director noted that the existing platforms from FAO, UNICEF and UNFPA were being supplemented with new ones established by a regional development bank and the International Monetary Fund. The need for a harmonized approach was noted, together with the fact that this was a burden for the national statistical office. Concepts may also vary between different United Nations entities, for example in relation to enumeration areas. One area that could cause a significant burden for the national government and also directly detract from the use of statistics was the development of different estimates. Improvement in coordination was also important at the training level, where a staff member of one United Nations entity noted that 50 per cent of the training conducted was on basic statistical approaches. Training at this level could be coordinated with the other capacity development efforts in the United Nations and beyond in order to avoid regular repetition of training on basic issues among participants.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

69. The conclusions and recommendations provided in this chapter are based on the findings presented in chapter III. An element of interpretation is necessarily involved in moving from findings to conclusions, but the present evaluation has tried to minimize the subjective elements inherent in any interpretation by remaining as objectively close to the findings as possible. While the findings generally look back to the work that the United Nations system has carried out in the past, the conclusions also look forward and consider the implications of the findings within the new environment for the global statistical system at the global, regional and national levels.

70. The following four conclusions represent the key messages that the present evaluation is presenting to Member States for consideration when examining options for reform of the support from the United Nations development system in the area of

[60] Government of the Republic of Moldova, ILO, UNICEF, UNDP, UN-Women and UNFPA: "Strengthening the national statistical system of the Republic of Moldova".

national statistical capacity development. Conclusions 1 and 2 address the second evaluation objective[61] and conclusions 3 and 4 address the third objective.[62]

71. The recommendations follow logically from the conclusions. In formulating the recommendations, an attempt has been made to focus on broad policy issues that are relevant at a high strategic level rather than on details of the design and implementation of projects and programmes. Specifically, the recommendations are aimed at strengthening United Nations system operational support for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The recommendations address the fourth objective of the evaluation.[63]

A. Conclusion 1 on overall performance

United Nations system entities at the global, regional and country levels have made important contributions to the development of national capacities for producing statistics. The work that the United Nations system has carried out on establishing statistical standards has been highlighted as an important area of success. However, there are some challenges concerning the quality of the contribution to statistical production, specifically related to coordination of activities, the sustainability of the results and the relevance of activities to the priorities of all national stakeholders. Nonetheless, the United Nations system needs to build on its successes, address the challenges and maintain its global leadership in this area in order to be effective in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Drawing on findings 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

72. The first conclusion summarizes the key findings relating to overall support from United Nations system entities for capacity development for statistical production. It is largely positive and reflects the unique role that the United Nations plays in this area. While financial support from the United Nations system for national statistical capacity development is not a particular area of strength, the United Nations system plays a major role in the global statistical architecture and in national statistical capacity development, a role that cannot be simply described in terms of money.

73. The challenges to increasing the quality of the contribution from the United Nations system are generally not only applicable to work on supporting national capacity development for the production of statistics. Promoting the sustainability of capacity development interventions is challenging across all areas of work. Coherence and coordination has been a challenge for the United Nations system generally but particularly so in the area of statistics development, where there are so many United Nations entities that are involved with different elements of countries' national statistical systems at the global, regional and country levels. Moreover, the issue of

[61] To assess, to the extent possible, the contribution of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development and the value it has added.

[62] To analyse the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system in support of national statistical capacity within the context of a larger international effort.

[63] To recommend strategic actions for strengthening the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development in the future through amendments to its role, positioning and approaches.

relevance and alignment to national priorities is more complex in the area of statistics, where the demand for support is not only from the national government and the citizens but is also for internal monitoring and project design as well as for global and regional reporting. United Nations system support through a nationally-driven and owned strategy for the development of statistics would help address some of these quality concerns.

74. The new and evolving global statistical environment presents challenges as well as opportunities. For the United Nations system, the challenges relate both to strengthening what is done already while expanding the role to adapt to the new environment, and, in particular, to the rise of non-traditional sources of data. The 2030 Agenda requires not only more statistics to measure more indicators, but also disaggregated and subnational statistics that will help monitor inequality in all its dimensions,[64] and the progress towards ensuring that no one is left behind. The opportunities relate to the renewed interest in this area, and to increasing recognition by national stakeholders in the statistical systems, as well as by donors funding the support for the systems, that there is an important role for statistics in achieving national development goals. There is also the possibility, in some circumstances, of being more efficient and more ambitious in statistics production through the use of new technologies and non-traditional sources of data. In this context, the leadership of the United Nations in terms of setting standards, principles and guidance is essential.

Recommendation 1: The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should make national statistical capacity development a major strategic priority of the United Nations system entities addressing production, dissemination and use of official statistics, and should call on all Member States to redirect the financial resources necessary to support all three areas.

B. Conclusion 2 on use of statistics

Although the United Nations system has helped member States to strengthen their capacities for the production of statistics, more needs to be done to operationalize the mantra of the United Nations Statistical Commission that better data leads to better lives. The United Nations system has not always recognized statistics as a national governance issue and has not done enough to promote and facilitate the use of statistics to achieve national development goals. Effective use of statistics by policymakers, civil society and the private sector is essential if countries are going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and go beyond simply monitoring progress towards the targets. This requires support for the development of national capacities to explore the wealth of data often produced by national statistical systems and to undertake deeper analysis, not just of trends but of the underlying causes of the obstacles to achieving national development goals.

Drawing on findings 2, 4 and 6.

[64] Going beyond income inequality to capture racial, ethnic and caste discrimination and inequality; and gender-based discrimination, including violence against women and girls, and unpaid care work.

75. The focus of United Nations system support needs to move away from internal use for reporting and its own programming and monitoring, towards meeting the demands of national policymakers and citizens where the use of statistics can have a more direct effect on improving people's lives. Although there are major needs for a strategic change in focus, it is important to acknowledge that addressing the use of statistics has not been totally ignored by the United Nations system. There are areas where efforts have been made to promote use, for example through support for the development of dissemination platforms or for the preparation of research reports based on a survey, census or administrative reporting system. It is also important to note that improvements on the production side — to the quality, periodicity, timeliness and availability of statistics — are an important contribution by the United Nations system to the use of statistics. The United Nations system therefore has broad experience with supporting the use of statistics, even if more needs to be done. What is missing, however, are forums that bring together United Nations statisticians, policy specialists and programme managers to learn from experiences in this area (i.e. what worked and why) and to strengthen approaches for the future, including on how to undertake monitoring and evaluation.

76. The challenges of supporting capacity development for greater and deeper use are complex and are as much about addressing incentives and political constraints as they are about helping to develop individual technical capacities to undertake statistical analysis. Yet, there is inadequate guidance to help United Nations country teams as a system to identify the context-specific approaches to supporting greater use, identifying bottlenecks, monitoring success, and so on. At the same time, country teams have not always exploited their comparative strengths, such as their near-universal presence and their status as a trusted partner, to become more involved in the non-technical aspects of supporting the use of statistics. This role could be strengthened by building mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations such as PARIS21 that have technical expertise in supporting comprehensive approaches to building capacities in national statistical systems, but do not have a presence on the ground, and that have been encouraged in evaluations to strengthen their relationships with users of statistics, something that is not easy to do from afar.

77. The quality of United Nations system support for national capacity development in regard to the use of statistics is also important. Poor coordination of dissemination platforms (national, regional and global) or a lack of coherence between concepts or estimates (as identified in the findings) do not help to promote more effective use, and need to be addressed. It was also found that the United Nations system did not always align its capacity support to the needs of national statistical users, and did not always support the capacity of the users to take greater ownership of the process of identifying and selecting the most appropriate and cost-effective statistical products necessary for strengthening decision-making and accountability. The United Nations system needs to ensure that all future interventions undertaken in support of national statistical capacity development are anchored in the demand of national statistical users. This will mean using those global and regional initiatives that can be adapted effectively to the specific national context, and taking a differentiated, context-specific approach. Where necessary, the United Nations country team's convening power should help national governments to bring together statistics and development — producers and users — for a development view of statistics. Such initiatives could

include support for aligning statistical plans and strategies with national development planning systems and processes, where this has not already occurred.

Recommendation 2: The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, should reaffirm that the principal goal of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development is *the use of national statistics for supporting the achievement of national development goals*, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and in this regard, requests United Nations system organizations to make all efforts to support achievement of this goal.

78. While the United Nations system can bring strong technical skills to support the production of statistics, such production is only a means to an end. The use of the statistics at the national level to support the achievement of national development goals must be recognized as the intended result of United Nations system support and the measure of its success. It is thus not a case of supporting either production or use of statistics, as the two are intertwined and have a logical linkage.

Recommendation 3: Executive heads of United Nations entities that work on national statistical capacity development should establish a network (a working group or task force) that will bring together the different entities' policy, programme and statistics departments in order to define how to better support more effective use of statistics by national stakeholders to achieve national development goals and should develop system-wide guidance for United Nations system entities on this issue.

79. In addition to system-wide discussion at the global level, discussion and adaption of the global guidance should also take place at the regional and country levels in partnership with member States and organizations outside the United Nations system. This will ensure more appropriate guidance and modes of regional support for United Nations country teams working on strengthening capacities for more effective use of statistics. One United Nations system entity with experience both in supporting national statistical capacity development and in engaging in national strategic policy development should take the lead in managing the network.

C. Conclusion 3 on strategic positioning

The United Nations system is not as yet appropriately positioned to increase its contribution, and the quality of that contribution, to national statistical capacity development in the new global statistical environment. The 2030 Agenda presents challenges and opportunities that will require a more effective and efficient United Nations system response. Notwithstanding the ongoing work of the high-

level group[65] that has the potential to strengthen the United Nations system's leadership of the global statistical system, no overarching plan exists at present that clarifies the respective roles of the various United Nations system entities supporting national statistical capacity development efforts, or the division of labour between them. In addition, the level of investment in the United Nations entities may be inadequate if they are to lead the integrated United Nations system response to the emerging data revolution for sustainable development. From the year 2000 up to the present, national statistical capacity development has been one among many United Nations priorities for supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, but if the United Nations system is to be successful in regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, it should give greater importance to this area of its work and consider reviewing the mandates of the key participating United Nations entities.

Drawing on findings 1, 6, 8 and 9.

80. Interviews with key stakeholders reveal the challenges to coordination of the various United Nations entities involved in national statistical capacity development. The work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the meetings of the chief statisticians of the United Nations system are trying to address these challenges, and the forthcoming global plan of action may support greater progress for the United Nations system in this area. However, development of an overall strategic framework for the United Nations system that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the different entities working to support national statistical capacity development is essential, especially in the increasingly complex global and regional statistical architecture. It is becoming of even greater importance as implementation of the 2030 Agenda gets under way and as the data revolution takes hold in more and more countries. As part of the process of developing the new strategic framework, it would be important to consider a key recommendation from the recent OIOS internal audit of the United Nations Statistics Division,[66] that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in consultation with the United Nations Statistical Commission explore the possibility of designating a senior official as United Nations chief statistician to coordinate statistical matters across United Nations entities.

81. The regional commissions' statistical divisions have the potential to play an important role in supporting the 2030 Agenda through national statistical capacity development. They are close to the countries they cover and have an important role in supporting United Nations country teams in their work or in supporting national statistical systems directly in countries where the United Nations presence is limited and/or where country team resources are small. At present, the weak linkages

[65] The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (composed of Member States and including regional and international agencies as observers) was established by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2015. It aims to establish a global partnership for sustainable development data and it reports annually to the Statistical Commission.

[66] Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Audit of the management of the statistics subprogramme and related technical cooperation projects in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs" (report 2016/032).

between the regional commissions' statistical divisions and many country teams are a major barrier to more effective, efficient and integrated United Nations system support. The regional commissions' statistical divisions also provide an opportunity for countries to have a voice on the global stage and can facilitate South-South solutions in this area. At the regional level, gaps in addressing regional and national needs have often been filled by other regional and subregional organizations, in some cases leading to an abundance of schemes, initiatives, agreements and training opportunities. Some United Nations system entities at the global and regional levels have successfully participated in large global statistical programmes, thereby leveraging their technical contribution. This will necessarily have to continue and even increase. Nonetheless, additional resources will be required by the United Nations system, especially in support of a larger role being taken by country teams in the development of national statistical systems, where appropriate.

Recommendation 4: The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, to develop a strategic framework for the next five years regarding United Nations system integrated support for national statistical capacity development at the global, regional and country levels, setting out the roles and areas of work for entities at all three levels.

82. This framework should be guided by the need to leverage existing capacities and mandates at all levels[67] and to bring them together to ensure the setting-up of a comprehensive United Nations architecture to deliver integrated and holistic support to nationally-owned statistical capacity development processes. This effort would capitalize on opportunities for synergy, ensure that resources were allocated to the most appropriate level and reduce duplication and overlap. The framework should also be explicitly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It would help to align the funding, functions, governance and organizational arrangements of the United Nations system in the area of national statistical capacity development. Moreover, it would examine funding gaps to address the growing needs in this area and would look for innovative solutions to address them, possibly through pooled financing mechanisms and/or by mobilizing private sector resources.

83. It is important that the framework be developed through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process, not only to ensure that it is well designed but also to increase the likelihood that it will be implemented. The framework needs to ensure linkages between existing coordination mechanisms at various levels and the need to set out clear performance criteria so that the performance of the United Nations system can be periodically assessed. Moreover, the framework must take into account what other agencies (international, regional and bilateral) are already doing. The United Nations Statistical Commission, as the United Nations intergovernmental body bringing together all national chief statisticians, should play a leading role in developing such a plan. Relevant organizations outside the United Nations should also be involved.

[67] The framework should also take into account the existing planning and reporting processes of participating United Nations entities.

D. Conclusion 4 on the country level

At the country level, United Nations system entities are not always acting as a coordinated, coherent and integrated system when supporting national statistical capacity development. Countries frequently receive support from the United Nations system in the form of many separate initiatives, often driven by global agendas, and usually across a wide range of national partners. Although the programmatic fragmentation of the United Nations system support has been addressed (to some extent) in some countries through joint United Nations programmes, approaching national statistical capacity development as a system has, in general, been a challenge. Where there is a lack of coordination and coherence, it becomes more difficult for the United Nations system to provide broader support to member States in developing comprehensive national statistical systems that will sustain the production of statistics and their use. In this respect, United Nations resident coordinators' offices need to be strengthened with statistical capacity to promote an integrated United Nations role in national statistical capacity development.

Drawing on findings 4, 5, 6 and 8.

84. Corporate guidance, better linkages with regional commissions' statistical divisions and individual capacity development need to be undertaken if the United Nations country team is to be fit for purpose. This will need to build upon the existing efforts to address coordination and coherence at the country level through the introduction of standard operating procedures and more integrated approaches to developing UNDAFs. Country team capacity will need to be strengthened to develop country-specific appropriate responses to national statistical capacity development needs. Importantly, as national statistical systems adjust to the new global statistical environment, the United Nations system will also need capacity, or access to regional capacity, to guide the national statistical office and ministries, departments and agencies on the adoption of new technologies and approaches and on partnerships with the private sector as a supplier of data.

85. In addition to the United Nations coming together as a system, it also needs to provide its support for national statistical capacity development through the national statistical system. Just when further support is needed to address the extra challenges of monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has the opportunity and potentially the capacity to make a significant difference. While there is often collaboration in terms of getting input into sample surveys (and this is by no means universal), further collaboration, for example on training activities, is generally limited. Furthermore, the fragmented support often does not help in developing the basic infrastructure of the national statistical system or in ensuring that effective business processes are put in place, which will be essential if national statistical offices and other producers are to take advantage of new data sources. In this respect, the balance between investments in sample surveys, and long-term sustainable investments, especially for administrative reporting systems, ICT systems and professional training, needs to be improved.

86. It is unlikely that the United Nations system on its own will have the resources to provide the kind of support that is necessary to undertake the type of comprehensive support that is needed, and in many countries other international partners are providing the resources directly to the national statistical system. However, where appropriate, the United Nations system at the country level should engage in partnerships and leverage resources to ensure that the resources to address national priorities are available.

Recommendation 5: The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should ensure that national statistical capacity development is a strategic area of support for all United Nations country teams, recognizing that the role will vary significantly between countries as determined by the national authorities.

87. As this is a strategic area of support, the United Nations system should, where necessary, champion the development of the national statistical systems, leverage resources, and provide integrated, differentiated, context-specific support through multi-stakeholder processes. It is essential that the support from the United Nations system be undertaken in partnership with other key international organizations working in this area. The role of the United Nations system in national statistical capacity development would be clearly set out in the UNDAF (or similar) under the leadership of the resident coordinator. Guidance on assessing the country-specific role of the United Nations system in the area of national statistical capacity development during the preparation of the UNDAF should be developed. In this context, system-wide support would include the support being provided from the regional and global levels. Moreover, any potential integrated and holistic support for national statistical capacity development should also leverage on, and take into account, what other international agencies are already doing in the country, and partnerships should be built as appropriate. Where agreed by partner governments, the Sustainable Development Goals framework at the country level could be the "holistic manner" to address national statistical capacity development, including the coordination issues identified by the present evaluation.

E. Summary of recommendations

88. Box 1 below summarizes the five recommendations drawn from the findings and conclusions of this evaluation.

Box 1. Summary of recommendations

Two policy recommendations:

- Make national statistical capacity development a major strategic priority for the United Nations system and call for a corresponding increase in resources.
- Make *use of statistics* the principal goal of all national statistical capacity development efforts.

Three organizational recommendations:

- Crossing the global, regional and national levels, develop a strategic framework for the United Nations system to improve its organizational arrangements and to promote an integrated response, in the area of national statistical capacity development. The framework will help in aligning the funding, functions and governance of United Nations system support. In doing so, the framework will set out the resources that would be required by the United Nations system to strengthen and increase its support in this area in response to growing needs. The United Nations Statistical Commission should take a leading role in this effort in order to promote adequate ownership by member States.
- At the global level, a voluntary network of United Nations staff involved in the production and use of statistics will share knowledge, learn from others' experiences and develop guidance aimed at strengthening United Nations system support for a more effective use of statistics. The network will interact with member States and with organizations at the global, regional and national level in developing such guidance. A United Nations system entity with experience in supporting the production and use of statistics should lead this effort. The network could provide a useful perspective on the role of the United Nations system in supporting greater use of statistics to feed into the development of the above strategic framework.
- At the country level, where a differentiated response is required, make national statistical capacity development a strategic area of support for all United Nations country teams, bringing together the United Nations system at all levels for an integrated response to capacity development needs under the leadership of the resident coordinator. The strategic approach to national statistical capacity development would be integrated into the nationally-owned UNDAF or a similar United Nations joint instrument at the country level.

Annex

Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit

JIU/REP/2016/5

		Intended Impact	CEB	United Nations					Regional Commissions					Funds and Programmes					Other Entities			Specialized agencies										Related Organizations	
				OCHA	OHCHR	UNDESA[a]	UNODC	PBSO	UNECA	UNECE	UNECLAC	UNESCAP	UNESCWA	UNDP	UNEP	UNFPA	UN-Habitat	UNICEF	UNAIDS	UNCTAD	UN-Women	FAO	ICAO	ILO	ITU	UNESCO	UNIDO	UNWTO	UPU	WHO	IAEA	WTO
Report	For action		☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
	For information		☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recommendation 1		f,g		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Recommendation 2		i,f		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Recommendation 3		b,c,d,f		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Recommendation 4		a,c,d,h,k		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 5		a,d,h,k		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L

Legend: L: Recommendation for decision by Legislative organ E: Recommendation for action by Executive head

Intended Development Result **a**: enhanced transparency and accountability **b**: dissemination of good/best practices **c**: enhanced coordination and cooperation **d**: strengthened coherence and harmonization **e**: enhanced control and compliance **f**: enhanced effectiveness **g**: significant financial savings **h**: enhanced efficiency **i**: Relevance **j**: Impact

[a] Statistical Division, and Population Division of UN-DESA.